

# COBBETT'S WEEKLY POLITICAL REGISTER.

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"The great enemies of real liberty have always been the WHIGS. The Riot Act, the Septennial Bill, the infernal Excise, are all the works of the Whigs. The Tories, as they are called, will find at last, that they have no security but by joining with the people. The people have never hated them as they have hated, and do hate the Whigs, who are false, designing hypocrites, with liberty on their lips, and tyranny in their hearts."—*Register*, 5th November, 1807.

## NORTHERN TOUR.

(Continued.)

At Mr. JOSEPH JOHNSON'S, Smedley Lane,  
near Manchester, 3d January, 1830.

I CAME off from Liverpool this morning, after having had three evenings of lecturing, or speech-making, namely, on Tuesday, the 29th of December; on Thursday, the 31st; and on Saturday, the 2d of January. It is an old saying, that "long is the lane which has no turning in it." A more correct way of expressing it would be, that "long is the course of error, if correction never come." I told LORD GREY, in a letter that I addressed to him in the year 1822, that *events were at work for me*; that I should triumph by events in spite of every thing that could be done by the Government, or even by the people themselves; that I rested for my success on my predictions; and that I was sure that if the whole nation were to unite as one man, in order to prevent the fulfilment of my predictions, it would be out of their power to do it. I was sure that, in the end, I should be proclaimed to have been right from the beginning; I bore the calumny of such fellows as COKE and SUFFIELD, and all the hireling tribe throughout the kingdom; not only

without complaining did I bear their calumnies, but I heard the calumnies with pleasure, because I knew, that in the end, those very calumnies would add to my fame, and to my power of doing good to my country. I knew that converts are more zealous than even the old settled disciples. I knew that those who had been opposed to me in the most violent manner, would, at last, become my most zealous partizans. Then there were, at the same time, all my other wonderful efforts of industry, working for me; and I expected that which I now behold, the people nearly unanimous in the desire to show that they are of my opinion, or at any rate to show that they have no hostility towards me.

This I found precisely at Liverpool. There were from six to nine hundred persons to give their money, some two shillings and some one, to hear me, who, only about a couple of years ago, appeared to be looked upon by the far greater part of these people, as a man not only unworthy of attention; not only as a person whose opinions were of no value; but as one whom no decent person would think of going to look at. I had the pleasure to see members of Parliament, the richest merchants in this opulent town; in short, I had the pleasure to see the bankers, and all the principal persons in the town, sitting before me, and so sitting for the purpose of hearing my opinions, having given their money for permission so to sit. When PETER MACCULLOCH came to this same town, he came loaded with letters of introduction and recommendation: all Scotland was put in a state of requisition, to muster him up an audience in Liverpool. The merchants who had received letters by him, bought his tickets, gave them to their clerks or warehousemen, and thus PETER got an audience, which, after all, might have been, as they say of a close-running pack of hounds, covered with a blanket. They might have been covered with a pretty decent carpet, at any rate; for the num-

ber, I understand, was next to nothing, not exceeding above a couple of hundred at any rate.

It was impossible for me to behold my audience at Liverpool, without receiving a perfect conviction of the great change which has taken place in the public opinion. I have been the rallying-point of one part of the nation; the rallying-point of all those who detested the paper system. All who have held that set of principles which include, and may be said to be summed up in an implacable hatred of the paper system, have taken my name for their motto; for the rule of their conduct in politics. It has required too much time for men to give their reasons and their opinions, and, therefore, they have cut the matter short, by saying, "I am for Cobbett," or "Cobbett's right," or something of that sort. On the other side, the parties have thought it quite sufficient, instead of saying that they approved of the paper and funding system, to say that they "hated old Cobbett." So that my name has become "*the question*"; the touchstone; and people have, in general, long had their minds turned to this point: "*Is Cobbett to triumph, or is he not?*"

When I saw my audience at Liverpool, I saw that the public had decided the point: I saw that it had decided that I should not only triumph, but that the triumph should be so signal, as to leave no doubt in the mind of any man in the world. I am aware, and I was aware, and so I told my audience, that it was *curiosity* which had, in great part, procured me the audience that I then had the honour to address. I was quite sincere: I was well aware of this; but the curiosity itself was quite enough to show that I was destined to triumph over the conceited, proud, insolent, arrogant, and stupid creatures who have, for so many years, been keeping this enlightened and industrious country in such a state of uncertainty, distraction, ruin, and beggary. The curiosity itself was quite enough to convince me of that; for the curiosity arises out of the weight attached to the opinions, and the effect produced by the writings or

speaking of the individual. If I had two heads or four hands, or something in that sort of way; if I were seven or eight feet high, or not higher than my boot; then the curiosity would be traced immediately to its spring; but, in my case, though the spring is not so manifest, or very little reflection is enough to convince any one, that the bringing of the people together, even if they came out of curiosity, ought to have been quite enough to satisfy me. I really knew, as an acquaintance, but one single man in Liverpool, and that was, as all Liverpool well knows, Mr. THOMAS SMITH, the bookseller, in Lord Street. I went to a private lodgings, near the Music Hall (where the lectures were delivered); very few persons had any intercourse with me; so far from carrying letters of introduction, as Peter did, I declined every overture to introduction of any sort. Still I had the most respectable of audiences, the most attentive and patient hearers; I met not with a single mark of disapprobation of any sort; I received great and frequent applause; I was received with cheers on the first evening, and I took my leave amidst a general cheer; on the last evening, after a speech of two hours and three quarters long, which I could not contrive to shorten, and which was heard with a degree of attention, with an immobility on the part of the audience, and with a patience such as I never witnessed before for a similar length of time.

There wanted nothing more than this, even if this had been wanted, to satisfy me that the game of corruption was up; that the vile paper system was condemned to die; and without that system, I know that the great mass of corruption cannot live. Bank-noting and boroughmongering began together; and together they will die. The great blow at them was, the blow stricken in 1826. The small notes, as I always said, were the cement of the whole system. Whatever other foolish tricks the arrogant and insolent fellows have thought proper to play, they have never meddled with the one-pound note until now: they have stamped them; they

have regulated their circulation and liabilities: they have adopted measures tending to lessen their quantity: but, until now, they never had the salutary folly to enact the absolute abolition of all the notes under five-pounds: the moment they did that, they put themselves at my mercy; as CROMWELL said by the Scotch, "The Lord delivered them into my hands"! notwithstanding the act, which was passed to screen them from the contempt of those whom they called their constituents. Lawyer SCARLETT, who seems so anxious to protect them from contempt, and to enforce that law which he, amongst others, opposed; Lawyer SCARLETT should know, that it is not the prosecution of printers; that it is not the hunting down of newspaper writers, that will enable farmers to pay rents with *wheat at five shillings a bushel*, and taxes at *sixty millions* a year; and the Lawyer should make up his mind either to prosecute the bushel of wheat or the sovereign, and punish them for conspiring together; or take in the leg of mutton, as it requires three to make a conspiracy to bring his Majesty's Government and his Majesty's Parliament into contempt. The bushel of wheat might be prosecuted for selling for five shillings, and the leg of mutton for selling for four-pence a pound, while the sovereign might be prosecuted for not giving more than the five shillings in one case, and the four-pence in the other. If LAWYER SCARLETT could turn his forces upon these, and carry on the war against these, with the assistance of his deputies, Messrs. BROUGHAM, the enlightened BROUGHAM! the "*Liberal*" BROUGHAM; the Scotch-London-University BROUGHAM; if LAWYER SCARLETT would set on upon the bushel of wheat and the other two culprits, backed by sensible BROUGHAM, who rejoices that we are unable to go to war; if the Lawyer would but pour out his wrath upon these three conspicuous culprits, and make the sovereign give fifteen shillings for a bushel of wheat, and ten-pence a pound for a leg of mutton; if the Lawyer would do this, and were to succeed, he would then deserve some

praise from his employers; he would then afford them some relief in their hour of distress; but, unless he can do this, he may just as well keep his informations to himself, and keep his accusing breath to cool his porridge.

His proceedings, however, have attracted a great deal of public attention in every part of the country, as far as I can perceive. Some call it "Scarlett's campaign"; some call it a return to the "*ancien régime*"; meaning the *régime* of PERCIVAL, ELLENBOROUGH, GIBBS, SIDMOUTH, LIVERPOOL and CASTLE-REAGH. If the Lawyer would, indeed, lay an information against the DEBT now, and employ again the patriot, BROUGHAM, and a whole nest of small-beer Whigs, with grey mares' tails upon their heads; being determined, apparently, to give us an unquestionable proof of Whig liberality and love of freedom, let him take a drive at the DEBT, and treat her to an information equal to half a dozen folios, for I am sure she is at work day and night, Sundays and working days and Saint's days, to bring his respectable and pure Parliament into contempt. She, every day of her life, tells them that they shall never go to war again so long as she exists, even though the French invade the Isle of Wight: she cramps the pretty fellows, in all sorts of ways; she pares their nails; she files their sharp teeth; she raps their knuckles; she makes their feet gouty; she pinches their purses; her very name flouts them and scouts them. Let the Lawyer prosecute her, then; and if he overcome her; if he get a fine fixed upon her to the full amount of her property, he may safely let the press remain without being checked by him and Mr. BROUGHAM, who seems to be a sort of learner upon this occasion; seems to be getting his hand in, as an apprentice begins occasionally to execute the higher work immediately under his master. It would have been very awkward for Mr. BROUGHAM to defend Mr. ALEXANDER or Mr. BELL; and yet he was liable to be called upon to defend them if he had not previously taken a brief on the other side. But seriously, I do recommend to LAWYER SCARLETT, to



lay an information against the DEBT. I will prove, by indubitable testimony, in abundance, that the bare existence of the Debt, daily and hourly holds the Parliament up to hatred and contempt. Why not inform against her, and get her fined, then? I am told that she is an incorporeal thing: not more so than the press! She can commit an act having a tendency to a breach of the peace, as well as the press can: she can as easily (and is much more likely to succeed in it) excite the Government and the Parliament to commit an act of violence upon her, as the press is likely to excite them in the same way. Nay, I say, SIR JAMES GRAHAM, and several others, have declared their positive intention, or at least their wish, to assault her! Therefore, her conduct, her bare existence, threatening every hour, to cause a breach of the peace to be committed upon her, surely there is, according to LAWYER SCARLETT'S own doctrine, ground for a good long thundering information. This is the way to come at her: men have puzzled their brains how to enfeeble her, and bring her down, and they have puzzled their brains in vain. SAINT VAN endeavoured to enfeeble her, and to quiet her libellous tongue by reducing the *per cents*. Alas! that was productive of nothing but panic. SIR JAMES GRAHAM proposed to take away, at once, a third part of her blood, and tame her in that way. Mr. THOMAS ATTWOOD proposed to bring her down by means of small money; and the REVEREND PARSON CRUTTWELL, rector of Bexhall, in Suffolk, had the wisdom to propose (and he perseveres in proposing) to lop off one half of what she has in the world, by making the money in which she is paid, of one half of the size of the present money. Alas! these are all trifling; these are all childish expedients, and so is that of sweating her down by the means of another batch of worthless rags: either of these methods would be called robbery, breach of national faith, and God knows what; but, bring her into court on a charge of libel, clap upon her a good thundering information *ex-officio*,

fine her to the amount of her last farthing; after getting a verdict (or half-a-dozen verdicts) against her, clap this fine upon her back; and then she swoons away, and we are rid of her for ever. If LAWYER SCARLETT can do this; if he can find out law for it, I trust he will set about it with all possible dispatch; but, of one thing I can assure him, and that is, that unless he can succeed in a proceeding like this, or can prosecute all the civilised world for not getting into it double the quantity of gold that it has now, he will not succeed in screening the Government and Parliament from contempt.

In the year 1811, the Government suggested to the House of Commons to pass a resolution, and it did pass a resolution, declaring that a one-pound note and a shilling were equal in value to a guinea.

In a very little while after the passing of that resolution, it passed a law to compel landlords to take their rents in paper of the Bank of England, if the tenants chose to pay in that and not in gold; and, at the same time, it passed an Act to punish people, as guilty of misdemeanor, if they sold a guinea for more than a one-pound note and a shilling, or gave for a guinea more than a one-pound note and a shilling.

All these things took place at the suggestion of the same Government; they were the acts of the very same Parliament; they took place nearly at one and the same time; that is to say, before the sound of the voice was hardly lost, which solemnly declared the one-pound note and the shilling to be equal in value to a guinea, those who had made the declaration, and who had promulgated that declaration to the people, passed a law to punish that very people if they sold the guinea or bought the guinea for more than the one-pound note and the shilling. Just as if they had said, "A one-pound note and a shilling are equal in value to a guinea, but yet it is necessary to prevent the guinea from being sold for more than a one-pound note and a shilling"! Now, these facts are notorious; the sun at noon-day is not more notorious than

these facts. They are matter, and must be matter of history: the bare statement of them, has a tendency to bring the actors into contempt. Yet, must we not state, then; must historians be silent upon the subject, too? SIR JAMIE MACKINTOSH is said to be writing a History of England for grizzly-pated Murray, who called me "the hoary democrat of Kensington." Now, if SIR JAMIE should happen to relate what was done about the currency in 1811, he cannot say other; he cannot do less than state the facts; and if he do state them, does he not write and publish that which has a tendency to bring the actors into contempt? Take care, then, SIR JAMIE, or your brother, SIR JAMIE, may chance to lay you by the heels. LAWYER SCARLETT tells us that he will be graciously pleased to allow of *fair discussion*. Good, LAWYER SCARLETT; but now let us see how this squares with your doctrine. I mean to discuss, for instance, the resolution and acts of 1811. But I must state the acts first; I must describe the things that I am going to discuss; before I discuss a transaction, I must describe the transaction; but your doctrine would stop me at the threshold; because, before I enter on the discussion; the moment I have stated the facts on which I mean to comment, I am, according to your doctrine, a libeller that ought to be silenced, because there is no question that the bare statement of the facts has a tendency to bring the parties into contempt.

Again, in the history of another instance: in the year 1822, Minister Van proposed to the Parliament to pass an Act, allowing small notes to continue in circulation until the year 1833; and I beg LAWYER SCARLETT, if he can abstract his mind from contemplating those glories which he doubtless expects to be the result of his "campaign," to mark well, not only the nature of the facts, but the date of the facts which I am now about to state.

FIRST, the Ministry suggested to the Parliament, in July, 1822, to pass an Act to continue small notes in circulation until the year 1833.

SECOND, in the month of February, 1824, Mr. ROBINSON boasted, that is to say, the Ministry boasted, that this measure had relieved the nation from all its difficulties, and had made it happy and prosperous beyond measure, and the Parliament, particularly the House of Commons, cheered the declaration to the skies.

THIRD, in that same month of February, they were distinctly told by me, that their prosperity would speedily pass away; that the gold would leave the country, that the country would be placed upon the eve of a convulsion by a blowing up of the banks; which would take place, unless they reduced the taxes and withdrew the small paper-money, and that it would take place within the space of two years.

FOURTH, in just about one year and seven months from that day, the banks began to blow up; and, before the two years had expired, the Ministers distinctly avowed in the House of Commons, that, at one time, the country was placed in such danger, as to be within "forty-eight hours of barter"; an avowal made from the lips of Mr. HUSKISSON, who was then the Minister of Trade.

Now, Mr. LAWYER SCARLETT, and your associate, or rather under-worker, Mr. BROUGHAM, what is the natural tendency of this historical relation, in which, however, I have omitted the slaughter made upon the country bankers, which immediately followed, and which, in 1829, put an end to the circulation of small notes, in direct violation of the compact made with them by the act of 1822. I have omitted this; but, putting this to the rest, and taking the five distinct facts altogether, what is the sort of feeling which is not only likely, but which is certain to be excited in the mind of every reader by the bare statement of these five facts? Is it respect; is it veneration; is it confidence; is it an opinion that the Ministry is wise, and that the Parliament is wise, and is incessantly watchful over the interests of the people? Is it feelings and opinions of this description that the bare statement of these facts is likely to

excite? Is it not, on the contrary, certain that reason and nature must be banished from England before men can refrain from entertaining contempt, at the least, towards those who have done these indescribably mischievous acts?

Again, do we not all know, that at the passing of Peel's Bill, one of the Ministers declared, that "the question was now set at rest for ever"; and has not the question, though the House of Commons shouted three cheers for the man who said that the question was set at rest for ever; has not the question been agitated from that day to this; has not that measure gone on troubling and ruining the people for ten years; is not the trouble now greater than ever, and is not the question now farther from being set at rest than ever it was; and must I refrain from stating these facts lest your fangs *ex-officio* should be stuck into me; because the statement has a tendency to bring the actors into contempt?

I must cease to mention instances; for to go to the end, would require twenty Registers equal to this in size; but I cannot refrain from mentioning one instance more.

**FIRST FACT.** In the year 1786, or 5 or 7, I forget which now, PITT established his sinking fund; and, in this case, CICERO PITT was cordially joined and supported by DEMOSTHENES FOX. The promise was, that the nation, in return for the sacrifices that it had had to make on this account, would see the Debt completely paid off at the end of forty years or thereabouts; and that, if war arose, it would keep the Debt from increasing during that war.

**SECOND FACT.** The fund was carried on for more than forty years, the Parliament and the Government always boasting of its powerful and salutary effects, and always holding it out as the sheet-anchor of our hope.

**THIRD FACT.** At the end of the forty years, the Debt amounted to more than eight hundred millions of pounds sterling, though, when the promising fund was established, that Debt amounted to only about two hundred and thirty millions.

**FOURTH FACT.** That now this fund has long been called a "humbug" in that same House of Commons itself; while LORD GRENVILLE, who was PITT's coadjutor in the making of the fund, has publicly declared it, under his own name and signature, to be, and always to have been, delusive, *essentially* delusive and mischievous; and that the Parliament, by its acts, as well as by its language, have, by nearly demolishing the fund, given its adhesion to the opinion of this statesman, who had been assisting, for forty-two years, to carry on a thing essentially delusive and mischievous.

Now, LAWYER SCARLETT, what feelings are these facts calculated to excite towards the Government and the Parliament? Are we to say that both are entitled to our respect and confidence; or, are we to hold our tongues? However, silence here will not save us, according to your doctrine. We must not state the facts, though we say nothing about them; for, if to mention the bare facts be sufficient to tend to excite contempt towards the Government and the Parliament, we come within your purview at once; for what is your doctrine, in substance; what is that doctrine on which you call on judges and juries to act? It is this:

**FIRST**, that it is criminal to put forth any thing having a tendency to bring the Government and Parliament into contempt, with an *intention* to do it.

**SECOND**, that the *intention* is to be *inferred from the act itself*.

**THIRD**, that all which the jury has to do, therefore, is, to ascertain whether the words published have a tendency to bring the Government or Parliament, or both, into contempt.

This neat doctrine brings within your claws every man who shall barely state any of the facts that I have stated above, and who shall then hold his tongue; say nothing in the way of comment. If he state the facts, he is compelled to add *something in praise of the Government and the Parliament*. Silence will not do. There must be positive praise of the parties, accompanying a statement of facts of their deeds. The



writer must say that it was wise and meritorious to do all the things that I have mentioned. This is the only way of clearing himself from the inference mentioned under the second head of your doctrine: to state the facts, and not to praise the parties, is to leave the facts to produce their natural effect; to produce the contempt inseparable from the statement; and the intention being, according to you, deducible from the words themselves, nothing short of positive praise of the actors can save the devoted victim, who, blind-folded, has run into the ingenious whig trap of you and Mr. BROUGHAM.

Let us, before we quit this view of the matter, take the case of GOULBOURN, whom I always call *the sensible*; though, perhaps, that will not save me. When the Scotch Small-note Bill was before the House of Commons, GOULBOURN stated distinctly that the abolition of the small notes would not have a tendency to lessen the circulating medium; because, said he, the bankers, having got rid of the *ones*, will be **MORE LIBERAL IN ISSUING THEIR FIVES!** This was enough to immortalize any man. I told GOULBOURN, in a few days afterwards, that the ones were the legs that the fives walked upon: that the bankers would discount no more after the ones were gone, except upon a very limited scale, and for some special purposes; and that the fives never could circulate to more than a distance of ten miles from home; that the quantity of circulating medium would be prodigiously reduced; and that, unless a large part of the taxes were taken off, terrible must be the sufferings throughout the whole country.

The suffering is come, and GOULBOURN's opinion is laughed at even by boys: and, when all this mischief has arisen out of this staring blunder, which was exposed at the time upon the spot; and after the Government and the Parliament have persevered in producing the mischief, am I to hold my tongue? Am I not even to state the facts, the bare facts, because the statement has a tendency to bring *the sensible* GOULBOURN into contempt?

Now for another view of the matter; now for another danger; now for another of the numerous hooks by which you may catch us, you being, apparently, a tremendous angler, catching by the mouth, the gills, the fins, or the tail. If it be libellous to print and publish any thing having a *tendency* to bring the Government and Parliament into contempt, amongst what burning ploughshares walk the men who print and publish parliamentary debates! Of all the publications in the world, those are the best calculated to bring the Government and Parliament into contempt, not only by implication, but positively. One member accuses the Ministry of folly, of stupidity, of waste of the public resources; of all sorts of imbecility and all sorts of profligacy. Another accuses the House of neglecting its duty; of sanctioning a waste of the people's money; of, in short, passing foolish and unjust laws. Now, is not the publisher of these speeches fairly caught upon your hooks? The words have a manifest tendency to bring the Parliament into contempt; no man can deny that; and, according to your doctrine, the publisher of the report is liable to punishment. The law makes no exception in favour of reports of debates: they stand upon exactly the same ground with other publications; and, to maintain any distinction here, you must deem the debates a sort of farce, and contend that a thing so farcical is incapable of tending to excite contempt.

To come closer home, suppose I were to say that the Six Acts, and particularly one of them, relative to the press, was opposed by LAWYER SCARLETT, when he sat on the Whig side of the House; and that, he having been made Attorney General, and removed to the other side of the House, and a motion having been made to repeal that very act, *he opposed that repeal*, and was joined in that opposition by his present coadjutor, Mr. BROUGHAM, who also had opposed the act with all his might, when it was passed; and suppose I were to cap the climax by observing, that your prosecutions against Mr. ALEXAN-

DER and Mr. BELL have been carried on upon the new principles of the law contained in that very act.

Suppose I were to say all this, and that all this were true, as it is true, am I, therefore, to be prosecuted, harassed, torn to pieces, broken up in my affairs, crammed into a jail amongst felons, treated like a malefactor, merely for stating the facts? Better at once have a licenser; ten thousand times better have a licenser, than carry on a system like this, and call it liberty of the press.

And, who is to *petition*, I want to know, without being caught upon one of your hooks? How many hundreds of petitions have stated that the people suffered from the acts of the Government and the Parliament; how many have complained, in the bitterest terms, of the corruption and bribery by which the seats are filled! Yet, it has not occurred to any Attorney General hitherto to prosecute the parties petitioning. The Houses both require that the Petitions should be "*respectfully worded*"; and they are said to be respectfully worded, and they are, in fact, respectfully worded, though they complain of the doings of the Parliament, and though the facts they contain, and the assertions they make, cannot do otherwise than have a tendency to bring the Parliament into contempt. I petitioned the House of Commons last year, in which I represented that the officers of the Government, and the pensioners and sinecurists sitting in Parliament, had, in fact, doubled the amount of their own places, pensions, and sinecures, by Acts of their own passing, and by which same Acts the people have been reduced to misery. The tendency of this statement was so manifest, that nobody could miss seeing it. There was not a juryman in England who would not say that it had a tendency to bring the Parliament into contempt. But, my county member, Mr. DENNISON, hesitated not one moment about presenting the petition, and the House hesitated not a moment in causing it to be printed. According to your doctrine, I was punishable for writing the petition; and Mr. DENNISON for

publishing it, and thus would the door be eternally closed against all petitions; because, to petition is to pray that the Parliament will do something; to pray it to do something, is to intend to accuse it either of having done something wrong, or of neglecting to do something right; is to accuse it of a fault either of commission or of omission; and to accuse it of a fault, is to have a tendency to bring it into contempt. Then, as the Parliamentary printer prints and publishes all the petitions, and all the votes, and all the resolutions of the House, he is the greatest libeller of us all, and ought to be caught by the belly with one of your tremendously sharp hooks.

If your law be law, and if it be acted upon; if juries adopt your doctrine, and if the bench, by its sentences, sanction that doctrine, the words "liberty of the press" are expressive of the most miserable mockery that ever disgraced law or language; and you will have improved upon every severity that ever was yet heard of in England with regard to the press. If your doctrine be adopted, who is to dare to propose any changes in the measures of the Government? Who, above all things, is to speak of the unfitness of a Ministry? Who, unless he has got an assurance of his life from Providence itself, is to dare to question the moderation, the mildness, the humanity, of an attorney-general or a judge? Who is to dare to state any fact, however notorious, that has a tendency to bring parties like these into contempt? To remonstrate with these parties; to discuss their conduct; barely to state facts, and to leave the public to decide, comes within your capacious purview; and, with juries to act upon the doctrine, the destruction of the victim is certain. So long as twenty-five years ago, I printed and published, even in the time of little sharp PERCIVAL, that the PITT sinking fund was a "SPLENDID HUMBUG." The scribes of the Government abused me; SHERIDAN (*a Whig*) suggested, that I ought to be dealt with by the law; but all men of sense; all men who had any regard for the liberty of the press; all men who had not liberty upon their lips and ty-



ranny in their hearts; all men, indeed, throughout the country, thought me in error, but revolted at the Whig idea of suppressing me by force.

Yet, if I were now to call the project of the new police a humbug, and a most expensive humbug; if I were to call the miserable patch-work with regard to Ireland, by the same name; if I were to call many other things, that I could now name, humbugs, I should be safely within the purview of your law; up you would pull me by the gills, or by the "paunch," or something; and there would be the end of all printing and publishing, except tracts on religion, or essays on the best mode of saving from starvation this industrious but ingenious people, who have been brought to their present state of misery, by the acts of this present Ministry and Parliament.

The *time*, too, for conjuring up this new and severe doctrine, seems to me to be the very worst that ever was selected for such an enterprise by mortal man. You are not a far-seeing gentleman, your eye, cunning as it is, extends not very far beyond the surface of your briefs: if it did, you would know and consider these facts; that the country is in distress, and deep distress, from one extremity of it to the other; that the rich see that they are losing their fortunes; that the middle class feel that they are fast going to decay, and that the poor are in want of a sufficiency even of bread; that, notwithstanding all this suffering, there is no where a desire evinced to make an opposition to the laws; that the people are patiently waiting for some alleviation to their sufferings; that the press, generally speaking, and, indeed, almost universally speaking, is participating in feeling with the people, and is the *organ remonstrating for them with the Government and the Parliament*. *Remonstrate* it cannot, without imputing blame; to impute blame is to intend to bring the Government and Parliament into contempt; and thus your doctrine, making short work with the nation, commands it to hold its tongue, and suffer in silence. We all seemed to be

cordially united; all ready to forget former divisions and animosities, and to beseech the Government and Parliament to take our case into consideration, and to save us, and the state along with us. This, until your "campaign" commenced, was the feeling of the country; I trust that that campaign will not disturb such a feeling; I trust, above all things, that the victims will not be made such an example of as to terrify us out of our senses, and to reduce us to the state of the most abject negro-driven slaves; and, in that hope, I lay down my pen for the present.

WM. COBBETT.

TO THE

## READERS OF THE REGISTER.

Manchester, 5th January, 1830.

MY FRIENDS,

We have just had the first lecture in this place. It is now ten o'clock at night, and the post goes off early in the morning. I never saw an audience that I liked better than that which I have addressed this evening. All old grievances seem to be forgotten on both sides. For my part, I shall take care not to revive them. The Mechanics' Institution, which appears to be rather larger than that in London, and much finer, was crowded to excess; and with regard to my reception, it was as good as I could *possibly wish*. I trust I merit something, but the applause was certainly beyond the merits of any man.

Hark ye! if we had a wise Government and Parliament, would not they, being acquainted with this strange and wonderful change; recollecting, that ten years ago, the authorities of this very town, in violation of Magna Charta, in violation of every principle of law, did, in fact, forbid me to pass through the town, or to enter it; would not a wise Government perceive in this change, an indubitable proof of the prevalence of my principles; and would not they see the necessity of a reduction of taxes; and would they not, IN TIME, make

that reduction? I have maintained the wisdom of returning to the currency of our fathers; I have called upon my hearers (all the rich, and all the deeply-interested men) to stand by the Duke in carrying through the present law; and I have every where found them resolved to stand by him, if he flinch not, and if he make that reduction in the taxes which this new state of things will demand. Good night.

I am your faithful friend,

and most obedient servant,

WM. COBBETT.

N. B. I wish I had had Huskisson here to defend himself upon these boards this evening, or to attempt such defence.

## STATE PROSECUTIONS.

(From the Scotsman.)

A good Government cannot be degraded or brought into contempt. Government is impersonal. It consists of institutions, rules, and principles. A Government is not free if these cannot be subjected to the test of reason; and it would be insulting to common sense to maintain that freedom can exist without the privilege of proclaiming, examining, and characterising, all the official and public acts of all the functionaries engaged in administering the Government. We confine our position exclusively to public and official acts. The private life of such functionaries is sacred. It is not public property. Their official proceedings, however, belong to the public; and of these, truth cannot be a libel; and such truths, instead of degrading or tending to degrade the Government, must always tend to purify and protect it. If the public measures of public men be bad, the publication of what is true respecting them may expose, degrade, and bring into hatred the administering officials, but it is for the interest of Government as well as of the public, that this should be so. No Government can be secure when it is mal-administered; when it is surrounded

only by venality and corruption. Servants of this description ought to be driven away from the Throne: but how can this be done, or how can Ministers be made responsible, unless their Ministerial acts can be laid as open as the light of the sun at noon-day? Juries, who have the law of libel in their own hands, should laugh at the idea of Government being degraded, or its interests affected, except for good, by the truth and the whole truth, being told of the official acts of all or any of those who are concerned in the administration. They are called upon, by all the great principles of the Constitution and Government of their country, to protect every one in the exercise of this right, in the performance of this duty, of free and full examination.

We regret deeply, therefore, that Sir James Scarlett should have mixed up these prosecutions for personal calumny, for imputing dishonourable and criminal acts falsely, with charges of degrading the Government and bringing it into contempt. It might be necessary to do this in the writ of information, in compliance with the requisitions of form, in order to obviate objections of a technical nature which a special pleading brother of the law might otherwise have started against his proceedings; but it was not necessary to resort to such topics in argument. His case ought to have been rested entirely on the falsehood and malice of the libels. It is lamentable, certainly, that some minds cannot distinguish betwixt the discussion of principles, or the examination of public measures and personal abuse. It is still worse when the discussion of public measures is only sought as a pretext for assailing individuals by personal calumny, invading the sanctuaries of private life, or artfully mixing up what is false with what is true. And we do not know a graver offence against the body politic than that of attempting to gratify malice against individuals under cover of maintaining the liberty of the press. The injury done is not confined to the reproach which is thus brought upon the press itself; to the suspicion which is cast over it; but if those in power

happen to be its enemies, as they often are, a door is thus opened to them for taking measures against the press generally, or, at the least, for establishing precedents that may be wrested to the disadvantage of all connected with it. A more effectual method could not be devised of playing the game of those who meditate the establishment of absolute authority. The press is discredited, men of character are driven from it, and if it fall into the hands of desperadoes only, the law may then, practically, do what it pleases with the press.

It is amusing to find writers of this desperate and unprincipled character, complaining that there is no law with regard to libel. The less that exists, either of law or justice, the better it is for them; and if we cease to have either, it will be chiefly through their misconduct. The state of the law, as a whole, is, no doubt, utterly indefensible. As it has often been laid down by the bench, as we find it advocated in law books and from the lips of lawyers, it is adverse to reason, and irreconcilable to all justice. It is fettered and impeded by many of the existing rules for the admission, or rather non-admission of evidence. It is thus uncertain in its result, and always oppressively expensive. But, thanks to Mr. Fox, the administration of this law of libel is placed in hands by which every fair and honourable writer may be protected. Libel is nowhere defined; we have no codification on the subject. But still we have law. And the law declares that it is the province of the jury to say, in each particular case, whether the writing charged as such be or be not a libel. This is the true and only palladium of British liberty. Let the judge state his opinion, and let that opinion be what it may, the jury may disregard the charge; it is binding neither on their understandings nor consciences. They are entitled to think and act for themselves; and it is our opinion, that if they acted rightly, they would refuse to establish guilt wherever evidence was excluded, and acquit all who merely related and commented on

facts relating to public or official proceedings. The jurors, in each case, are both legislators and judges; they at once declare and apply the law; and supposing that juries are chosen indiscriminately, and in such a way that power can neither exclude nor admit individual jurors, we do not see how, in relation to questions of a political nature, betwixt the Crown and the people, the law could possibly be placed on a better footing. Under such a state of things, foolish verdicts will no doubt be pronounced, injustice will occasionally be done; but it is a state which (throwing the rules of evidence and the forms of procedure out of view) can be improved only by increasing the intelligence and strengthening the virtues of the people. It would be better, certainly, if juries could, at present, be nominated so as to consist only of the wisest, best, and most independent members of society; but as the office of discriminating would go to the side of power, and might be turned against the people, it is safer to adhere inflexibly to the principle of impartial rotation. Educate the people; confer knowledge upon all in the middle ranks of society; implant integrity, increase the influence of moral feelings, and the law of libel will cease to be an evil. Judges, even in political cases, would be impartial, because juries would be firm and independent; and for the same reason, from the discrimination and wisdom of juries, the press would attain its true elevation. Bad men would no longer derive profit or acquire importance from trading in abuse; while the enlightened and gifted, the wise and good, would feel themselves honoured in avowing their connexion with the press.

*(From the Kent Herald.)*

The present law of libel is a foul blot upon our boasted free institutions. Public opinion is not directed, purified, and existing healthily by it, but exists in spite of it. The public mind is fed and enlightened; the whole framework of political knowledge is sustained, by writers, speakers, and publishers, at the



daily hazard of their fortunes, and almost their lives. A journalist lives under the impending threat of ruin and a dungeon, like Damocles under the hair-hung sword. Any accident, however inevitable; any adversary, however contemptible, may draw down a prosecution. The infamous dogmas of truth being a libel, and that the proof of a libel is its *tendency* to bring contempt on the object of its strictures, are as complete prohibitions on the freedom of the press as the most rigid and ingenious tyranny could devise. We maintain it is impossible to conduct a newspaper at all, not to say with any degree of spirit or the exercise of talent, without incurring the liabilities of penal infliction at every publication. That prosecutions do not daily occur, that men and things are examined and commented on constantly and boldly, that public opinion and common sense support journalists against the interference of the vindictive and litigious, are no arguments in favour of the law. The law is too absurd, too inapplicable to the intellectual demands of the age, to be observed, and is habitually evaded or defied: yet still it exists, for tyranny or malice to use whenever its self-will is stronger than its sense of shame in resorting to such an odious instrument of oppression.

Should such hostility to the press in general, as is predicted by some of the present Administration, continue to be manifested, should we have any further evidence of a settled intention on the part of power to stifle opinion, the public must instantly rouse itself. The very existence of liberty is then threatened; and without the most effectual and triumphant opposition, the name of Briton will be synonymous with that of slave. If the people of England will give up the press, they will merit what they assuredly will meet, entire degradation and miserable slavery. Should there be any truth in the alleged crusade of all the European Governments against freedom of discussion; a conjecture formed from the simultaneous appearance of attacks on the press in England, France, and the Netherlands;

the crisis will have arrived. The hopes of the world will be at once established, or lost entirely, for our time. We do not ourselves contemplate such a manifestation on the part of our rulers, nor do we think that the spirit of our people is so sunken and debased as to allow it to triumph. There is energy in countless individuals, there is principle among the mass sufficient to baffle any such design. Associations would be formed; not such as were formed by the Tories at a somewhat similar conjuncture, to aid the tyrant law in gagging, dungeoning, and banishing the popular advocates, the denouncers of oppression and misrule; not "Mock Constitutional Associations;" not "Bridge-street Conspiracies;" but liberal associations of men who, despising those addicted to either faction, the almost equally selfish and anti-popular adherents of Whiggism and Toryism, would unite in defence of the people from the hostility of both. Funds would be collected, an organised system of perseverance and activity would be developed. The press and its writers would be defended and supported, its victory be secured, and failure be the least punishment of its enemies. No Tory conspiracy, even should that party, forgetting its present difference on the Catholic Question, cement its old alliance with the Court and Ministry, in fear of the utter extinction of its inherent principles; no Whig Attorney General could avail against the roused energies of the one, the popular party. Power might glut itself with victim after victim; while opinion, supported as it should be, would quietly, unceasingly supply the means of repeated resistance, if prudence withheld any more forcible demonstration. The press cannot be put down, if liberal and independent thinkers do their duty.

We have said that we do not anticipate any serious attack on the freedom of the press from the Wellington Administration; we believe the rumour of it to be a Tory calumny, "a weak invention" of bigotry, to strengthen an opposition to those Ministers who gave liberty of conscience to millions of our fellow-

subjects, and who are suspected of entertaining a tendency, only a tendency, towards liberal principles in commerce. The declarations of Sir James Scarlett, it is true, have done much to give consistence to these reports, and have excited a more general mistrust of the Administration than any other circumstance could, than even the fact of the prosecutions.

(From the *Dublin Evening Post*.)

One is really disgusted to witness what will appear to the world the vindictive prosecution against an individual; for it is evident that all these prosecutions are pointed at Mr. Alexander. Heaven knows, we have no sympathy for the politics or the apparent motives of the gentleman. We have been opponents of that policy, and, therefore, the supporters of the Government, by whose means Emancipation has been achieved. For this great benefit to Ireland and the empire, we, in common, with the *Morning Chronicle*, the *Times*, the *Globe*, the *Sun*, and all the hitherto opposition press in London, as well as the majority of the liberal press in Ireland, were not unwilling to overlook certain minor matters, on which, it is possible we should, under other circumstances, be disposed to fasten. But if, as the *Chronicle* insinuates, the present campaign of Sir James Scarlett is the commencement of a war against public opinion and free discussion, the consequence will be, to turn the press against the Administration, and convert that instrument, through the medium of which alone they were able to carry their measures, into an organ of annoyance. Sir James Scarlett is a man of too much sagacity not to be aware of this, and we take it for granted that he will run the round, and try whether the law or the press be the stronger. When the *Times* and the *Chronicle* are brought before the courts; when repeated decisions shall be had against the press, and when these decisions shall be found inoperative, there may be some *initiative* talked of, something in the style of the King of the Netherlands, but which

will amount to no less than a censorship, disguise it as we may. It is to us an additional pain to find that Mr. Brougham has received in all these trials a fee for the prosecution. It is true, he does not appear to have acted, but a Whig should not have lent the sanction of his name to these prosecutions.

(From the *Leeds Intelligencer*.)

Now let us suppose that Sir James's notable principle were put into practice, how are we to get rid of a Ministry, or Government, whatever the extent of their political sins? The worse their conduct, the more necessary would become the language of reprehension; the more necessary would it be, according to every principle of right and justice, to rouse public opinion, and induce the people to carry up their complaints to the Throne. But Sir James's doctrine meets us half way; we must lay down the pen; we must shut our mouths; we must abjectly submit; and the greater the offence, the more certain the impunity. This is the liberty of the press that a Whig Attorney-General will give us if a discerning jury does not stop him in his career of applying "wholesome correction."

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vested with this title, have not an exclusive jurisdiction over all the turnpikes even in the metropolis. Added to these exceptions, there are the several roads upon which various tolls are collected on the south of the Thames, in the neighbourhood of London; and there are also the bridges which are in London and the neighbourhood. The object of the author is to remedy, in some measure, the inconvenience which will still be felt by the public from the want of an uniform rate of tolls, and in this Manual to offer every traveller the means of always ascertaining with readiness the exact toll due.

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